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## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**

Historic Landmark Case No. 15-11

### **Tilden Hall**

3945 Connecticut Avenue NW  
Square 2234, Lot 1

Meeting Date: June 25, 2015  
Applicant: Tilden Hall Corporation and TFO FEVA UIP Tilden LLC (Urban Investment Partners)<sup>1</sup>  
  
Affected ANC: 3F  
Staff Reviewer: Tim Dennee

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate Tilden Hall, 3945 Connecticut Avenue NW, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and requests that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1924, the year of its completion.

The property merits designation under District of Columbia Criterion B (“History”) and National Register Criterion A for being associated with broad patterns of our history, and specifically for being associated with streetcar-line development and the remaking of Cleveland Park and the Connecticut Avenue corridor. It is an early apartment for Cleveland Park, and it illustrates in one building the adaptation of the apartment-hotel type to a common later, less service-intensive apartment model.

The property also merits designation under District of Columbia Criterion D (“Architecture and Urbanism”) and National Register Criterion C for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a Colonial Revival apartment building, one of unusual plan and orientation.

The five-story, brick Tilden Hall was constructed in 1922-1924 by the P.F. Gormley Company as a “high-class” apartment-hotel providing a range of amenities, including food service, to residents in one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments. Gormley’s financial problems slowed construction while the property was auctioned to the Ashler Fireproofing Company, one of Gormley’s subcontractors and the holder of a mechanic’s lien. The property was initially managed by the William H. Saunders Company before being purchased by Maddux, Marshall, Moss & Mallory, Inc., the managers of a half-dozen other apartment-hotels nearer downtown. In later years, the property became a more typical apartment house as it passed through several hands.

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<sup>1</sup> The nomination was prepared while the property was under the ownership of the Tilden Hall Corporation, but it was submitted the day after closing on the sale to the new owner, UIP, and was filed at the latter’s behest.

The building is an attractive example of a Colonial Revival apartment building with a tripartite organization, including a raised basement. Colonial Revival was one of the many modes with which its architect, Frederic B. Pyle, was conversant. A prominent local architect, Pyle is better known for the more classical Hecht's Department Store Building on 7<sup>th</sup> Street and the Equitable Savings and Loan Building at 915 F. The Colonial Revival was an extremely popular fashion, and it was seen as especially suited to suburban residential buildings. And Tilden Hall's marketing focused on its provision of downtown convenience in a suburban setting.

Not only was the Tilden Hall property well landscaped, but the building's V-shaped footprint provided views from all apartments, including direct views southeast into Rock Creek Park. The plan also responded to the acute angle of its lot, unusual in facing the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Tilden Street. Aside from the building's own amenities, the conveniences of downtown were largely dependent on the Connecticut Avenue streetcar. The 1891 bridge built by the Chevy Chase Land Company over Klinge Valley first brought the streetcar to Cleveland Park. Its arrival was to change the complexion of the neighborhood. While still characterized by grand homes whose owners had access to private transportation, the area saw new, more modest homes and duplexes and, in 1919, its first apartment buildings. Although car ownership was common in the 1920s, Tilden Hall was geared to the streetcar commuter, making little provision for parking. That may have been a central factor in its moving from "high-class" to a more standard residence as new buildings came onto the market.

With vigorous new development as far as Chevy Chase, Connecticut Avenue became an apartment building corridor in addition to a major travel artery. New buildings crept northward beginning with a post-World War I boom, and filled in gaps as the market demanded over subsequent decades. In fact, while Tilden Hall stands in the Cleveland Park neighborhood, it is just beyond the boundary of the historic district, as that portion of Connecticut was excluded because of the numerous large apartments that postdate the period of significance. Connecticut Avenue apartments were a different scale from what was generally found downtown, characterized by open C-, U- and E-shaped plans surrounded by broad lawns and courts. Even among this group, Tilden Hall's plan and orientation stand out as unusual.

In 1989, the Board adopted a multiple-property document on the theme of apartment buildings in Washington. Its principal purpose was to provide a context for understanding the development of the building type and its architectural and historical significance. The document divided examples into categories based on physical characteristics and chronology. The point was to provide for the designation of some good examples of each subtype of apartments, effectively broadening the number of examples eligible for designation, as it demonstrated the city-changing character of this building type, and all the various subtypes, beyond the most notable pieces of architecture.

The property meets the following designation criteria for an example of the "Conventional Mid-Rise Apartment Building Sub-Type"<sup>2</sup> as stated in the multiple-property document *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945*:

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as five to eight stories tall, containing at least fifteen apartments, served by a single public entrance, and designed to hold an elevator.

A-2 Buildings that illustrate the development of the apartment movement as it related to the need for housing including... its early formation throughout the city;

A-3 Buildings that are part of clusters, corridors, or districts that illustrate patterns of development of the city; and

C-10 Buildings that are the work of skilled architects [in this case, Frederic Pyle], landscape architects, urban planners, engineers, builders, and developers.